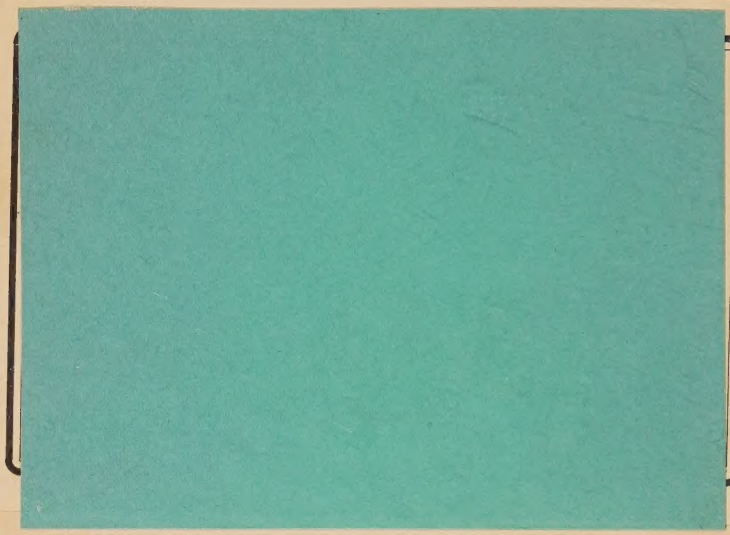

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THE RETURN OF CHRIST

CHARLES R. ERDMAN

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

BY

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With an Introduction by

THE REV. J. STUART HOLDEN, D.D.

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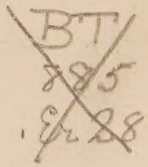

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TO
MY FATHER
WILLIAM JACOB ERDMAN
A PRINCE AND A MENTOR
AMONG STUDENTS OF PROPHECY
WHO
IN HIS EIGHTY-NINTH YEAR
STILL DISCOVERS IN SACRED SCRIPTURE
NEW TREASURES OF TRUTH

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FOREWORD

The purpose of these brief pages is to deepen conviction and to promote harmony of belief concerning the return of Christ. While not advocating the details held by any one of the groups into which students of prophecy are divided, the writer emphasizes the substantial elements of truth upon which nearly all agree, and intimates further that the points of divergence are largely those about which the Bible is silent or obscure. Many readers will recognize and welcome the views expressed, and even those by whom they are not fully approved will find in their perusal at least an opportunity of exercising the patience and charity which must be preserved "till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God."

Princeton, New Jersey.

INTRODUCTION

By the Rev. J. Stuart Holden, D.D.

My friend, the author of this small volume, has given me the privilege of association with him in an attempt to set forth the general outline of the New Testament teaching on the return of Christ, in terms free from the rival contentions which, unhappily, have gathered round the interpretation of the Great Hope as declared by Christ and his apostles.

The standpoint he adopts and the consequent views he maintains are identical with my own; and I earnestly join him in the hope that this plain statement of the case may serve in some measure to reconcile the needlessly hostile schools of prophetic interpretation, whose very zeal in advocacy has done so much to discredit the entire subject in the minds of thoughtful Christian people. These schools have, of course, a common denominator of truth, and the aim of this book is to recall them to its

recognition and to their own essential union, in order that all who love the appearing of Christ may unite in proclaiming to a world distraught and leaderless the full gospel of its only Saviour.

The great fact of Christ's Second Coming is no matter of uncertainty. It is writ large in the Scriptures of Truth as the essential completion of the work accomplished at his First Coming and by his present Session at the throne of God. The evidence for the fact that he will come and for the manner of his coming is as complete as is that for the fact that once he did appear among men. Around the three great words, whose depth none can fathom, Atonement, Advocacy, Advent, all history and prophecy concerning the Son of Man circle. Nothing, for instance, was clearer to his own consciousness as unveiled in the Gospels than the certainty that his departure was but for a season; "I will come again and receive you unto myself," is the text of his last discourse to the sorrowing men he must leave; and, enshrined in his institution of the Sacrament of

Redemption is an undying witness to this certainty, "Ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." It is not to be wondered at that this hope captured the hearts of those who companied with him and that the earliest Christian writings throb and glow with its intensity.

Whatever else may be said of the early Church, this is undoubtedly true, that its back was toward the world and its face toward the coming of the Lord. Its course was steered not alone by the chart of its creed but by the pole-star of its hope. The fore-gleam of the day illumined its dark hours, and saved it from present fears. Its moral and ethical life found surest impulse in the certainty that Christ would come, just as it had found firm foundation in the certainty that he had come; and the inspiration of its splendid sacrifices, conflicts and triumphs was in this same sure consciousness. "Now" was always "the day of salvation" and hence of earnest effort to win men to Christ, since tomorrow might be the day of glory.

Are we wiser in our own day? For it is un-

questionably true that we have to a large extent allowed the truth of the Lord's coming to drop out of our thinking. Many of the theological mazes into which recent years have brought us are largely due to the blind following of teachers who airily explain away the cardinal statements of the New Testament on hypotheses, the acceptance of which demands infinitely more credulity than reason; and much of our lack of spiritual passion, attested by the comparative powerlessness of highly organized effort, is due to the same cause.

That the whole subject has been to some extent discounted by unwise speculation and unspiritual curiosity has sorrowfully to be admitted. That, as presented by extremists, it has borne little relation to actual duty, either in theory or practice, it is likewise impossible to deny. In this respect, however, this great truth has only suffered as other elements of the Gospel have also suffered.

It is unnecessary to protest that we have no sympathy with anything in the way of fixing probable dates, which are altogether improb-

able, or, indeed, with anything which traverses the Lord's own statement regarding the uncertainty of the time of his return. Yet we are rightly jealous to preserve the force of his unqualified assertions as to the certainty of the fact. We are not disposed to argue this main position, for to us the Word of God is the end of all contention. Nor do we desire to treat the event as a subject of controversy. The way of holiness, so intimately bound up with the hope of Christ's appearing, is not to wrangle over but to walk in.

On the other hand, we deplore the position of those who neglect this truth and place their hope for the world in mere human schemes of social reconstructions and political programs and international compacts. No permanent peace, no brotherhood of man, ever can be established by force of arms or skill of diplomacy. The coming of Christ himself is the only hope for his people.

Should we not then lay hold afresh of this glorious truth in these days of trouble and uncertainty? Well has it been said that "while

the sinner who realizes his doom cannot look up, the believer who realizes his destiny cannot look down." It is by the uplifted eye and the consequently empowered heart and hand of them that live "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing" that Christ is glorified and that glad day is hastened.

If this small book does no more than re-echo the Master's injunction to "watch," and call his people from the pursuit of rival speculations to that more sure Word of Prophecy to which they do well to take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place until the Day dawns and the Day-star arises in their hearts, it will not have been written in vain.

St. Paul's,
Portman Square, London.

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Chapter I: The Doctrine

"The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." (*Titus* 2:11-14. *Revised Version.*)

Chapter I: The Doctrine

Jesus Christ will reappear. Of this fact there should be no doubt among those who believe his promises and accept the testimony of the men who knew him best. When last seen by the world he was dying on a cross between two crucified thieves. His disciples declared that after his burial he was seen of them alive, for forty days; that he ate and drank with them, and then withdrew into the sphere of the unseen; but they affirmed that he would return in visible glory; and their belief has been shared by the Christian Church through all the passing years.

This hope has been heralded in her hymns, from the solemn strains of the "Dies Irae" to the glad notes of such modern songs as:

"Lo! he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain,"

and

"Thou art coming, O my Saviour,
Thou art coming, O my King,"

and

"Come, Lord, and tarry not;
Bring the long-looked-for day."

This belief is embedded in her confessions of faith, as in the Apostles Creed: "He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead," or, as in the words of the Westminster divines, "So will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen." That prayer has been the climax of all petitions, as it has been inspired by the most sacred of all hopes.

The belief in the visible return of Christ has been so precious to the church, and so much in the thought of believers, because it holds so prominent a place in the New Testament Scriptures. It is at times surprising to note the frequency with which the truth is mentioned. One careful student finds three hundred and eighteen such references.

For instance, in addition to the parables and predictions of our Lord, we recall his great

prophetic discourses recorded in the twenty-fourth and the twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew, the thirteenth of Mark and the twenty-first of Luke. We remember how the story of the Acts opens with the Ascension, and with the promise to the disciples: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

The earliest letters penned by the Apostle Paul, the Epistles to the Thessalonians, have the return of Christ as the burden of their message; all his subsequent letters add to this testimony, while in his last epistle, Second Timothy, he expresses his expectation of the crown to be received at the appearing of the Lord, and he urges his young friend to be faithful in view of the coming and the kingdom of Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews urges his readers to persevere in the life of faith in view of the fact that "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." James encourages believers to be patient because "the coming of the Lord is at hand." Peter writes two epistles of which the key-note is this blessed hope; in them he continually

appeals to the glory to be revealed at the future appearing of Christ, and warns against false teachers whose essential error lies in their denial of this visible return.

In view of the deepening darkness and the distress of the last days, Jude quotes the cheering words of prophecy: "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints." John encourages us with the assurance that when Christ appears, "we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is," and he closes the New Testament with his Apocalyptic visions of which the index is given in the majestic words, "Behold, he cometh with the clouds," and "Behold, I come quickly."

This doctrine concerning the return of Christ, furthermore, is intensely practical. It has occasioned much unprofitable speculation, some of which has been vain and foolish; but surely this was not the design nor the fault of the sacred writers. The truth was emphasized by inspired apostles because it was regarded as bearing so definitely and so helpfully upon Christian conduct and service. It

was mentioned as a motive to repentance, to sobriety, to sincerity, to watchfulness, to patience, to fidelity, to endurance, to hope, to love, and to the manifestation of practically every virtue and moral excellence. Particularly, it was given as a source of consolation in hours of bereavement; for the statements relative to the coming of our Lord reveal the future far enough, not to satisfy curiosity, but to comfort the heart. Accordingly it may be fair to conclude that the ultimate proof of a true understanding of the doctrine will be found always, not in confident assertions of superior knowledge nor in dogmatic statements of belief, but in beauty of character and in a growing likeness to Christ.

This truth, however, is frequently perverted, discredited, and misunderstood. The return of our Lord is identified, mistakenly, with the visions of Swedenborg, with the "discovery" of Christian Science, with the delusions of Mormonism, with the vagaries of "Millennial Dawn," and with the fallacies of the various forms of modern "Adventism."

Even among evangelical Christians some of its most ardent advocates have adopted such fanciful interpretations of Scripture and have been so dogmatic in their assertions of error as to make the judicious grieve. Others, because completely neglecting the doctrine, and so lacking the restraint of its truths, have been swept away by secular programs and immersed in worldly forms of service.

Some persons emphasize the doctrine out of all proportion to other beliefs, regarding it as the foundation, rather than the cap-stone of the Christian faith; others deny its validity and declare it to be a creation of fancy or fanaticism, and trace its source to a falsely literal interpretation of the Bible. The former class are stigmatized as unscientific and lacking in scholarship, the latter as sceptical and devoid of spiritual insight.

Professed teachers of prophecy have divided themselves into two or more opposing camps, under different chosen standards, and have given the impression that the return of Christ is necessarily a divisive if not a dangerous doctrine.

In reality the doctrine, while involving di-

vine mysteries, accords with the most sober reason. While conveyed largely in figurative language, its main features seem definitely stated. While there is room for honest differences of opinion in the interpretation of even important details, the central elements are such as should bind believers into a closer union.

There are many to-day who are convinced that in reference to the coming of Christ there is more harmony of belief than is often supposed. They feel that the time has come for all who accept the cardinal truths of Christianity, to unite in emphasizing anew the great facts which they hold in common relative to the return of the Lord, to realize that the points on which they differ are in large measure matters of definition and are comparatively unimportant, to show more of charity and of sympathy toward those whose views they cannot accept, to keep open minds for the reception of new light, and to proclaim the essential reality with such kindly confidence as to bring to bear upon the whole church the sanctifying and unifying influence of that "blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

This is but one among the accredited doctrines of the church, but it is one which must not be allowed to fall into disrepute or neglect. It surely crowns every true summary of Christian belief.

"Living he loved me, dying he saved me,
Buried he carried my sins far away,
Risen he justified freely forever,
One day he's coming, Oh, glorious day."

Chapter II: The Visible Coming

"This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (*Acts* 1:11.)

"Behold he cometh with clouds and every eye shall see him." (*Rev.* 1:7.)

Chapter II: The Visible Coming

"Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Such was the promise of Christ; and it is with this great event that we are here concerned, namely, with the visible, bodily, glorious reappearing of our Lord.

This event is not to be confused with the spiritual presence of Christ in the life of every believer. The latter is also a blessed reality. In his farewell discourse, delivered on the night of his betrayal, Jesus strengthened his disciples by his sure word of promise, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." This belief in the spiritual coming of Christ, this confidence in his unseen presence, has been the stay and encouragement of his followers through all the ages. Nothing should make us lose sight of this truth. By Christian fellowship, by the study of the Word, by secret communion with the Master, it should become more real and

vital to us, and we should go forth and work with more of gladness and of cheer as we remember his words, "Lo, I am with you always." However, this is distinct, after all, from the truth we are discussing, namely, that Jesus is some day visibly to reappear.

So, too, this return is to be distinguished from the promised coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Both comings are mentioned in the first chapter of the Acts. First, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you"; and the second, "this same Jesus shall so come in like manner."

The marvels of Pentecost were rightly attributed to the power of the risen, living, divine Lord; yet long after that memorable day the apostles continued to predict with confidence the fulfilment of this second promise, and to comfort believers by the assurance of the "praise and honor and glory" they should receive at "the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Nor yet was this latter promise fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. It is easy to under-

stand why these two events have been confused, for both were predicted by our Lord in the same prophetic discourse. He combined the descriptions and used the features of the nearer event to color the picture of the more remote. He employed the approaching doom of the sacred city as a type and symbol of the judgments upon his enemies that will attend his visible return. One of these great events, the fall of the city at the hands of Titus, is now in the distant past, but the other is still future, namely, the glorious reappearing of Christ.

Nor should we identify the coming of Christ with the death of a believer. It is true that death may be in some respects but the servant in black livery who ushers us into the presence of the King; "To depart" is "to be with Christ" which for us "is far better"; "to be absent from the body" is "to be at home with the Lord." Yet, death is inseparable from pain and loss and sorrow and separation and anguish and tears. Death is still, in most of his aspects, our enemy; but the coming of Christ is our blessed hope; it is not the same as death. When Christ returns he will raise the dead and will

destroy death and will repair all the evil that death has wrought.

Jesus was himself very careful to distinguish between the death of his followers and his own return. In the closing chapter of his Gospel the Apostle John records the prediction of the death by which Peter was to "glorify God," and the further statement in reference to the "beloved disciple," that possibly he might not die but might live until his Lord returned: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Therefore death and the return of Christ are not identical, but are contrasted events.

More startling than the scenes at Pentecost, more momentous than the fall of Jerusalem, more evident and significant than the indwelling of the Spirit, more to be desired than our departure to be with the Lord, will be the literal, visible bodily return of Christ.

But, someone is asking, how can we distinguish this one event from the others with which so commonly it is confused? As we read the Bible how can we be sure which event is being described? One or two rules may be of

help. First, the terms used to describe the return of our Lord are definite and distinct. For instance, the word *"coming,"* which is always translated in the margin of the Revised Version as *"presence,"* is never used of the spiritual presence of Christ or of the coming of the Holy Spirit or of the destruction of Jerusalem or of death. This is a precise and technical term; it is the Greek word, *"parousia,"* and invariably means, in relation to Christ, his future, glorious, visible appearing. From the earliest centuries this appearing, therefore, has been designated by Christian writers as "the second coming of Christ" to distinguish it from the "first coming," which took place in the incarnation and earthly career of our Lord. Therefore, whenever in the New Testament we read of the "coming (*parousia*) of Christ," we can be absolutely certain that the reference is to his glorious return.

Much the same might be said of the word "appearing," once used of the first advent (2 Tim. 1:10), but elsewhere of the glorious return from heaven (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:18, 8; Titus 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:8), or of the word "revelation," when employed in relation to

Christ (2 Thess. 1:7 etc.), or the phrases "The day of the Lord," "That day," or "The day of Jesus Christ." None of these terms is ever employed in reference to spiritual experiences, to the destruction of Jerusalem or to providential events; all of them point to the return of our Lord.

Or take another equally simple rule: consider the context, when uncertain as to the event intended by a reference to the "coming of Christ." His return is described as being "with the clouds of heaven" and with "the glory of the angels." His coming is to be "like the lightning." He comes to deliver his followers, to raise the dead, to judge the world. Surely none of these features, or attendant circumstances, are connected with any statement as to the spiritual presence of Christ, or as to any other event described in the New Testament. Many other important truths are recorded; but none is more carefully distinguished, or more graphically set forth, than the prediction that the same Jesus who walked the hills of Galilee and hung upon the cross of Golgotha and ascended into heaven will reappear some day in power and great glory.

The most important event in all the past was the coming of the Son of God from heaven, and the supreme event of the future is to be the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. The sacred writers speak with reverence and with marked reserve. They say little to satisfy even a natural curiosity as to the details and continuance of this reappearing. Yet they agree in expressing its visibility, its sublime impressiveness, and its universal import and concern: "For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in his day." (Luke 17:24.)

"Lo! He comes, with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of His train;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears on earth to reign."

Chapter III: The Preceding Events

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

(Matt. 24:14.)

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that the man of sin be revealed." (2 Thess. 2:1–3.)

Chapter III: The Preceding Events

Men of the world seem to regard the future of the race either with vain self-confidence or with blank despair. The more ignorant predict the coming of an age of glory to be secured by social revolution, or by the growth of democracy, or by some international compact. The more thoughtful see that the cure is not so simple. They realize that the source of human ills lies in the selfishness of the soul and in the evil of the human heart. They are aware that human nature must be reconstructed, and that there is no hope in a Millennium made by man. They observe the sinister forces of evil now at work in society and they gloomily predict that civilization is tottering to its fall.

As a corrective both to vain hope and to foolish fear comes the revealed truth relative to the return of Christ. The New Testament teaches

that there is no excuse for shallow optimism or for blind despair. It shows that the present age is one of mingled good and evil, but it declares that good will be made to triumph in a measure by the power of the Gospel, and completely by the appearing of Christ.

The present task of the church, the supreme process preceding the return of our Lord is, therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel of his grace. "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matt. 24:14.)

This preaching is to be no mere superficial heralding of the good news. The process is clearly indicated by the work of the apostles, who sought to establish in every land Christian churches which would be self-supporting and self-propagating, the members of which would take their places in society and in the state, and do everything in their power to purify and strengthen and bless the circles and the communities in which they lived. The work was substantial; its methods were sane and wise. Christians were to be the "salt of the earth";

they were to be the "light of the world." No theory concerning the return of our Lord can be Scriptural which subordinates the preaching of the Gospel to any form of social service, or which on the other hand fails to establish abiding institutions, or to express in human helpfulness the true spirit of Christ.

Still, by whatever processes it may be carried on, the supreme event, the incomparably important condition to be fulfilled before the return of Christ, is the preaching of his Gospel in all the world and unto every creature.

Just how far the evangelization of the world is synonymous with the conversion of the world is a debated question to which no exact answer probably can be given. The New Testament indicates, and modern history is recording, great triumphs of the Gospel. Most readers interpret the words of our Lord as indicating that the influence of this Gospel will permeate all human society, and that Christian institutions will be established throughout all the earth. The number of Christian nations will continue to increase and when the work of conversion has reached its climax among the Gentiles, practically the entire Jewish race will accept

Jesus as their Messiah, either before or at the time of his return: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery," writes the apostle, "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." (Rom. 8:25, 26.) The present age is to be one of superb missionary effort, and the church of Christ is ever to be a source of blessing to the world.

There is, however, a darker side to the picture. No reader of prophecy should be a pessimist, yet none should fail to give due weight to the inspired teachings which declare that the present age will ever be one of mingled good and evil, and that its close will be marked by days of deep darkness just before the dawn of a brighter era. This is plainly indicated by the parables of our Lord, by his definite prophecies and by the writings of the apostles.

For instance, in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, which Jesus himself interprets, he pictures the character of the present age down to its very end; he declares that his truth is to be proclaimed and his followers to be found in

all the wide world; yet everywhere, and in their very midst, there will appear "the sons of the evil one"; and this mingled condition will continue during the entire era: "Let both grow together until the harvest," and "the harvest" is the "end of the age"; the time of the return of Christ and of the "judgment"; then "he will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. . . . Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. 13:41-43.)

Then again when Jesus sends forth his disciples to witness for him in all the earth, he does not encourage them with any promise of a world-wide conversion previous to his return. On the contrary, he warns them that they will be hated and despised and persecuted even until the end.

When in his great prophetic discourses he more particularly describes the character of this entire age and of the events which constitute its close, he insists that wars are not merely to mark its end, but are to characterize this entire era: "And ye shall hear of wars and

rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." He declares that just before his return there will be on earth a period of unprecedented distress and tribulation, and that "immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:29, 30.)

With these predictions of our Lord the teachings of his apostles are in exact accord, both as to the mingled good and evil of the present age and as to the distressful features which characterize its close. When they refer to "the last days," their words are not to be pressed too literally; they sometimes did have those exact days in mind, but frequently they referred to those days as already existing, and always their expressions indicate conditions which they

believed would obtain to the very end of the age. That is to say, whenever they began, these "last days" were to continue until the return of the Lord.

These solemn words are not to be regarded lightly, when, for example, Paul declares in his last message: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Tim. 3:1-5.)

In his last message to the Church, Peter warns us that the characteristic error of the false teachers who appear at the end of the age will be the denial of the return of our Lord: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying Where is the promise of his coming?"

Amid the dark shadows of these "last times" looms up one sinister figure of imposing power

and malevolent purpose, the "Anti-Christ," the "Beast," the "Man of Sin." Endless have been the speculations concerning this mysterious and malign being. One thing is evident, he is in full career at the time when Christ returns. This career seems to have been made possible by a great apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3), a "falling away" from a true faith in God. Even after the world has been evangelized, apparently out of the very heart of Christendom, steps forth this final embodiment of evil, who will demand for himself divine worship, who will arrogate universal power, who will cause immeasurable suffering to the people of God, but "whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming." (2 Thess. 2:8. R. V.)

Antiochus Epiphanes and Nero and other cruel tyrants have been types and prophecies of this future "Man of Sin." John tells us that persons of this character, men of this same spirit, real "Anti-Christs," already existed in his day. Paul declared that the "iniquity" which would culminate in the great Apostasy and in the Man of Sin was working in his day, only some "restraining" agency or person,

prevented for the present that matchless outbreak of "lawlessness" which would call for the personal intervention of the returning Christ.

With these two sides of the picture before us it is evident that the progress of Christianity it not to be uninterrupted or unopposed as it advances in triumph. While the Church increases in power there still will be corrupting forces within, and, as the age nears its end there will be a malignant massing of forces from without, until Apostasy develops and "the Lawless One" appears; but he will be destroyed by the return of the Lord, who comes as the Saviour of his loved ones, and as the Judge of their enemies,

"The Judge that comes in mercy,
The Judge that comes with might,
To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right."

Chapter IV: The Events to Follow

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (*Daniel* 7:13-14.)

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Chapter IV: The Events to Follow

The return of Christ must seem to many persons to be vaguely remote in time, and to be utterly unrelated in character to the pressing problems and duties of daily life. By the early Christians, however, the event was regarded as one which might occur in any generation; it was their constant inspiration, and its supernatural character enabled them to view all the experiences of time in the transfiguring light of eternity. To them it was a practical hope; and such an attitude of mind should be ours. We, too, should be aided by this truth to regard things present with the truer perspective which comes from a belief in the triumph of the kingdom of God on earth, and also in the immortality of the soul and in the glory of a future life.

There are times when we specially need the comfort and cheer of this blessed hope. Who of us has not felt the sorrow of a final separa-

tion, and has not, with wistful eyes, watched the sails sink beneath the horizon of the ultimate sea? Where now are these departed ones? Will they ever reappear? "If a man die shall he live again?" "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" These are the inevitable questions of the human soul, and the answers are inseparable from the doctrines concerning the coming of Christ.

"The resurrection of the dead" takes place at the return of our Lord. The Bible plainly teaches that there is to be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust. Jesus declared that an hour was coming when "all that are in the tombs" should hear his voice and come forth, "they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28-29.) John indicates that possibly these resurrections may be separated in time, as they are distinct in character. (Rev. 20:4-6.) However, the whole stress of the New Testament teaching is laid upon the resurrection of believers, and this event is made prominent as one of the most comforting truths of our Christian faith. In addition to many briefer references, we

find that, in the fifteenth of First Corinthians, Paul devotes an entire chapter to this theme.

A careful study shows that the term "resurrection," when applied to the future experience of believers, never refers to the mere persistence of personality, or to the immortality of the soul, or to a spiritual renewal or quickening, but always has reference to the clothing of the spirit with a glorious and an immortal body.

Just what the substance, or nature, of this body is to be, we are not told; only that it is to be like the glorified body of Christ. It is called a "spiritual body"; which does not mean that it is "made out of spirit," but that it is perfectly adapted to the indwelling of the perfected spirit. Christianity is not a religion which predicts a future state of shadowy, ghostly and insubstantial felicity; but one in which glorified beings are embodied in physical yet heavenly splendor. It is intimated that there is a relation between the present mortal body and the future body of glory; but in what the identity consists or by what link it is secured, is not made plain.

It is evident, however, that the resurrection

is a future event; it does not take place at death, but at the return of Christ. Our loved ones who disappear from our sight pass into heavenly blessedness; their bodies are asleep but not their souls; they are "with Christ," they are "at home with the Lord." There is, however, one degree of glory which they do not yet enjoy. They are now disembodied spirits, but they yet are to be clothed with immortal bodies of celestial splendor. This experience will be theirs at the return of Christ. For "now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Cor. 15:20-23.)

The return of the Lord also brings a transformation for the living. It is commonly said that "nothing is so sure as death"; there is one thing more sure; it is that one generation of Christians will never die, but will be living when the Lord returns, and at his coming,

will pass into glory without dying. "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:51-53, R. V.)

However, at the return of Christ, believers are not only to be transfigured, they are to be translated: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:15-17, R. V.)

Concerning this so-called Rapture of the Church there has been of recent years much

speculation. It is taught by some that this Rapture will be in "secret," and that it will precede the reappearing of Christ by "three and one-half years," or by "seven years," or by "seventy years"; that Christ thus will come first "for his saints" and then "with his saints, to destroy his enemies." It is further asserted that this secret Rapture may occur "at any time," or at "any moment," before the events which Paul seems to indicate will precede the coming of Christ, such as the Apostasy and the appearing of the Man of Sin. This theory has given rise to many mistaken beliefs and to some consequent errors of practice.

The doctrine appears to be founded upon a false interpretation of the translation, in the King James Version, of the opening verse of the second chapter of Second Thessalonians, which is supposed to teach that, in view of the fact that a "secret rapture" was to precede the visible return of Christ, the readers of the Epistle were urged not to be troubled in relation to the subsequent events which concern the Apostasy and the Man of Sin. The Revised Version, however, directly contradicts this mistaken view, and makes perfectly clear the mean-

ing of the original, in which Paul declared that he was to instruct his readers specifically in reference to the events which must precede this rapture. He clearly stated that the day in which believers were to be delivered from their tribulations (2 Thess. 1:6, 7), the day of Christ's coming and of their "gathering together unto him," would not dawn "except the falling away" came first and "the Man of Sin" was revealed. (2 Thess. 2:1-3.)

Another reason assigned for this theory of a secret, imminent rapture is the exhortations to watchfulness given by our Lord. It is argued that unless his return is possible at "any moment" it will be impossible to watch. However, it should be noticed that these exhortations are usually parts of long discourses in which Christ speaks first of the great Tribulation, which the Man of Sin will impose, and then mentions certain signs of his coming, and urges his followers to look for his return then, when the signs appear. Of course this does not mean that Christians are not to be watchful until the closing days of the present age have come. The events preceding his return, of which Christ spoke, were such as could occur in any gener-

ation, and some of them, like the preaching of the Gospel, were already under way. Furthermore, as the truest manifestation of vigilance is not excited expectation but faithfulness in service, then surely one can love the appearing of Christ even though he does not believe in a "secret-any-moment rapture" of the Church.

In any case, the order of events which are related to the return of our Lord is so imperfectly defined in the New Testament that those who expect his coming should not allow dissensions or divisions to arise because of divergent views as to the time when believers are to be "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thess. 4:17.) Rather, we should be united by the blessed assurance we all share that "our citizenship is in heaven, whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory." (Philip. 3:20, 21.)

Of course, this day of resurrection and rapture is not to be relegated to the dimness of far off ages. Paul used these truths to comfort those who were bereaved, by the assurance that

the time of the coming of Christ was to be one of reunion with those loved ones who had gone to be with the Lord. It is not altogether consoling to a heart broken by bitter loss to say, "You are certain to die soon, and then you will be with those you love." Paul, at least, had another message; it was that the living mourner might not die, but that the dead soon might reappear. "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him . . . then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 17, 18, R. V.) There is a certain sense in which we believe in "the communion of saints," of even the living with the dead. We all share in common the benefits of redeeming love, and in Christ we are ever one. Yet, literally, the dead do not speak to us nor we to them; we do not see them and we are not certain that they see

us; but Christian hope assures us of an actual reunion at the coming of Christ. This fact we call to mind at "the table of our Lord," when we point forward to a time in which we all shall be seated together at "the marriage supper of the Lamb."

> "Some from earth, from glory some,
> Severed only till he come."

The return of Christ is also a time when Christians receive their rewards. Only in a popular sense can we speak of the dead as having "gone to their reward." In reality they are still waiting for their rewards, the "crown of life," or the crown of blessedness, which they ultimately are to receive. As Paul himself declared, "henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8.) We cannot even conjecture the nature of these future rewards, but it would seem that the chief of all is to be that spiritual perfection which will result from a more perfect knowledge of

Christ. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him: for we shall see him even as he is." (1 John 3:2, R. V.)

This matter of reward, however, suggests a darker side of the doctrine, for there are rewards for the wicked as well as for the good. The coming of Christ introduces the Judgment. This reality is painted for us in colors which make the scene impressive and solemn. We see the picture in which all nations are gathered before the throne of the Son of Man, while some are sent away into everlasting punishment, and others are given a place in the kingdom which has been prepared before the foundation of the world. Or, again, we see "a great white throne" and the dead, the small and the great, standing before it, and the books are opened, "and if any was not found written in the book of life he was cast into the lake of fire." To-day men are tempted to take a light view of sin, and to look upon the future with carelessness and indifference. It might be well for us all to be reminded more frequently of the reality of future awards and of the fact

that present deeds are determining eternal destinies.

Last of all, but most important of all, the chief issue of the coming of Christ is to be his universal rule. Even the word "judgment" has a brighter meaning. It is used to signify not only "condemnation" but also "righteous rule." The coming of Christ is certain to be followed by the perfected kingdom of God. This kingdom has its heavenly and also its earthly aspects, and the chief reason why we should hope and yearn for the return of our Lord is because we believe it will issue in the final and complete fulfilment of that matchless prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

"Then shall wars and tumults cease;
Then be banished grief and pain.
Righteousness and joy and peace
Undisturbed shall ever reign."

Chapter V: The Millennium

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." (*Rev.* 20:1-6).

Chapter V: The Millennium

During many dreary centuries the heavy hearts of men have been cheered by promises of a coming period of universal peace and gladness, an age of glory and of gold. This future era of which poets and prophets have dreamed and sung, has been known popularly as the "Millennium," the "Thousand Years," and thus, perhaps unfortunately, has been identified with the period described by John in the twentieth chapter of his Apocalypse.

This obscure and difficult passage of Scripture contains a highly figurative description of a limited time during which Satan is bound, and the nations are at rest, and risen martyrs reign with Christ; but after this "Thousand Years" Satan is loosed and leads the nations of the earth against "the camp of the saints," and "the beloved city"; but his hosts are destroyed by fire from heaven and he is "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone."

All this is full of mystery. These symbols

cannot be interpreted with certainty or with confidence. No prediction of such a limited period of peace and blessedness is found elsewhere in the Bible. That the kingdom of God ultimately is to be universal upon earth, both the Old Testament and the New distinctly affirm, but they nowhere hint that it is to be limited to a "thousand years," and they describe no other age of universal peace which ends in such Satanic rebellion and world-wide war.

Is it not wise to raise the question whether this "Thousand Years" is to be identified with the predicted age of universal blessedness or with the prophecies of the perfected kingdom of God upon earth?

It does seem to many students that the importance of this particular passage of Scripture has been unduly emphasized. By its interpretations the Church of Christ is thought to be hopelessly divided. Differing views of this "Millennium" are supposed permanently to separate teachers of prophecy into three more or less inclusive camps. One holds that the return of Christ will precede the Millennium; they are known as Premillennialists. One holds that the return of Christ will follow the

Millennium; they are designated Postmillennialists. Others hold that there never will be a Millennium either before or after his return. However, an increasing number of earnest believers, classified individually in one or the other of these groups, feel convinced that such divisions should not exist, or that there should be a new appraisal of this passage and its related prophecies, or at least that differences of view should be held with increasing sympathy and modesty and love.

In the interpretation of this particular passage, Premillennialists obviously enjoy a great advantage; for whatever the Millennium may be, here it is, and it is said to be preceded by the coming of Christ and to be followed by "the new heaven and the new earth." Probably no ordinary reader, unhampered by any theory, would receive any other impression, as the order of the chapters is simply this:

Chapter xix The Return of Christ
Chapter xx The Millennium
Chapter xxi The New Heaven and Earth

The position of the Postmillennialists is here one of great embarrassment, for their

view makes it necessary to reverse this order of events; they must prove that the return of Christ follows the Millennium. They seek relief by supposing that Chapter xix described "the first" and not "the second coming of Christ"; but this position appears very difficult to maintain. For one reason, this scarcely seems to be a picture of the humble, despised Jesus, who was last seen by the world hanging dead on a cross between two thieves. He comes through the opening skies, he is followed by the armies of heaven, on his brow are "many diadems," he smites his enemies with the sword, and rules them "with a rod of iron," he treads "the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God" and his name is written "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." Of course these terms are figurative, but they seem to accord rather with those uniformly employed to describe the return of Christ.

Yet further it should be noted that the "coming" of Chapter xix is directly connected with the destruction of the Anti-Christ, the "Beast," "The Man of Sin." With his discomfiture the chapter closes; but, his overthrow is ac-

complished, not at the "first," but at the "second coming" of our Lord. (2 Thess. 2:8.)

The difficulty, however, is greater still. If Chapter xix pictures the "first coming" of Christ, where is the mention of his return? Chapter xx says nothing of his coming; so that his advent after the Millennium becomes merely a matter of the imagination. The awkwardness of the situation is such that no guileless Postmillennialist attempts to conceal it.

The position of those who deny that there will be a Millennium is even more delicate; for here is a passage which describes a Millennium and names it six several times. However, the calmness and adroitness with which the situation is met are such as always have elicited admiration even from the most adverse critics. It is confidently asserted that, while indeed there never will be a Millennium on earth, this scene depicts the blessedness of the saints in heaven.

Now it might be remarked that the suffering, sighing, sorrowing men of earth are not greatly interested in a Millennium which is confined to heaven, and further, that the "saints in light"

are supposedly quite secure before such a Millennium begins, and should not have their eternal felicity shortened to so comparatively brief a space as a "thousand years."

However, the serious trouble is that John says the Millennium is to be on earth, and says nothing about heaven. He states that during this "thousand years" Satan is bound, so that "he should deceive the nations no more," and when the thousand years are finished he comes forth "to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the *earth,*" and these nations go up "over the breadth of the earth," and compass "the beloved city" until fire comes down from heaven to devour them.

One should not be suspected of any lack of charity or of sympathy who expresses the belief that some more plausible explanation of the Millennium will be found than that which removes it from earth to heaven.

Premillennialists evidently enjoy a great advantage as they approach this particular passage, but many appear to press their advantage beyond reason. Here is a Millennium, and it does follow the return of Christ; but is it of

such a character as to contain all the elements and to realize all the features sketched by the rather exuberant fancies of some popular teachers of the Premillennial school?

Here is the picture of a time of blessedness for the nations of the earth; here also is specified a "first resurrection," which consists of no mere "spiritual" experience; for those who have a part in it are plainly contrasted with "the rest of the dead" "who lived not again until the thousand years were finished"; and here, best of all, is the vision of a reigning Christ.

However, is it certain, that this peace, which the nations enjoy for a season before they are led out by Satan to rebellion and destruction, is the peace described by the Old Testament prophets, to which peace there was to be "no end"?

Is it necessary to believe that the risen saints, in glorified bodies, are to constitute an actual court at Jerusalem, where Christ will be seated on a literal throne, ruling with Oriental pomp and splendor for a limited period of years? Is this the perfected kingdom of God upon earth, this reign which ends in universal disaster and carnage? Is it at this time, or in the age of

"the new heaven and the new earth" that all nature is to be renewed and the whole creation delivered from its anguish and its pain?

It does seem that the Premillennialists crowd into the rather dim and shadowy limits of this "Millennium" the fulfilment of predictions that have a wider horizon and belong to ages whose bounds and confines are never named.

It may fairly be replied that nations at peace, risen saints, and a reigning Christ constitute a prospect sufficiently glorious to satisfy our souls; nevertheless, it should be admitted that Premillennialists do have difficulty in adapting to this particular passage the very prophecies upon which they depend to paint the picture of their Millennial age.

One thing is absolutely certain; this passage makes it impossible for anyone to believe in a "secret rapture" of the church, or that the return of Christ may be "at any moment." This false theory has been very prominent in the teachings of many modern exponents of Premillennial views.

According to this theory, the "rapture of the church" and "the first resurrection" precede the appearing of the Anti-Christ and the Great

Tribulation which he will inflict. In this passage, however, the order is exactly reversed. Here martyrs who had suffered under the Anti-Christ, martyrs "that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image . . . lived and reigned with Christ"; and, as John declares, "this is the first resurrection." It is evident, then, that the return of Christ, "the first resurrection," and the "rapture" of the church, must take place after the Anti-Christ has appeared, and not before. The martyrs who suffer under the Anti-Christ are here declared to have a part in "the first resurrection." Martyrs must die before they are raised from the dead. The Great Tribulation must precede the First Resurrection and the Return of Christ.

This is the only place in the Bible where the phrase "first resurrection" occurs. It is very remarkable therefore that any person can teach that the "first resurrection" takes place before the martyrs, who have part in that resurrection, have been beheaded.

It is evident, however, that one can be a convinced and a consistent Premillennialist with-

out accepting this perverted though popular view of a "secret rapture" and of such an imminent return of Christ as may be described as "likely to occur at any moment."

The relative success of these divergent schools of prophecy in dealing with this particular passage of the Apocalypse, is purely a matter of personal opinion. It is, however, of deep interest to observe that their treatment of this chapter illustrates their characteristic faults in relation to the general body of prophetic truth; and it is of supreme importance to note that these faults relate not to the essence of the truth but to its secondary elements, and are embodied in certain more or less nebulous theories relative to the "Millennium." It is most encouraging to find that, as to the two or three great cardinal facts of prophecy, all these schools agree, even though each may advocate views and may encourage dangerous tendencies which are open to honest and kindly criticism.

For instance, the attempt to compress into the limits of the "Millennium" all the inspired predictions of the future blessedness of the

world, illustrates one weakness of many Premillennialists, namely, the failure to distinguish the ages and dispensations to which various prophecies point.

The pathos of this remark lies in the fact that the one thing upon which a Premillennialist usually prides himself is exactly his ability to "distinguish the dispensations"; it is this pride which has given him a certain facility in constructing "charts" and "diagrams" and "plans" of the ages.

Now the rule of "distinguishing" the ages is an admirable one; the imputation is, however, that many Premillennialists are failing to apply their own rule.

They turn to the Old Testament predictions and correctly restore to the Jewish nation many promises of blessing which too commonly have been appropriated by the Christian Church; but in their zeal for their Hebrew brethren they go too far and surrender to them many glorious prophecies which properly apply to this present Gospel age.

Further, they take the Old Testament predictions, which speak of universal and timeless blessings for the nations, and crowd them into

the "Millennium," when many of these predictions probably refer to a larger and more glorious era which lies beyond the millennial age.

When they turn to the New Testament they reverse the process in reference to the Jews. They take all the predictions of blessing, and apply them to the church, and heap upon poor Israel all the prophecies of woe. They teach that the church is to be "caught away secretly" from this scene of sorrow and distress, and then, under the Man of Sin, Israel is to suffer unparalleled anguish. Therefore as our Lord, in his great prophetic discourse of Matthew twenty-four and five, alludes to a Great Tribulation, these teachers hold that our Lord was giving messages intended only for the Jews and not for the church. Similarly, great corresponding portions of all the Gospels are designated as "Jewish"; and, on the same principle, all of the Apocalypse, from chapter four to chapter nineteen, is said "to belong to the Jews," and to have no relation to the church.

Now this unfortunate belief that the church is to be caught away suddenly, and that the whole world is to be left to destruction, has led many Premillennialists to take a very de-

spondent view of the future and a very narrow view of their task. Because "wheat and tares" are to "grow together until the harvest," some teachers fix their thoughts wholly upon the "tares" and forget the "wheat," and the probable proportion of each at "the end of the age." Because Satan is properly called the Prince of this Age, they forget how Jesus declared that all power ("all authority") had been given to himself in heaven and on earth, and that he expected his followers to go forth and to "make disciples of all nations."

Because the supreme task of the Church is to preach the Gospel just as far and just as fast as it can, and among all nations, and because there is no hope of a better world and of a brighter age without the regeneration of human hearts, some forget it is the unquestioned duty of every follower of Christ to show his spirit and to imitate his example in every sphere of social and civil and industrial and political life.

There is no need that one should be a pessimist because he is a Premillennialist; there is no reason why one should forget the sufferings

of his fellow men because he is looking for the return of Christ.

The obvious weakness of the Postmillennialist is his futile endeavor to crowd into the prophetic scheme some kind of an imaginary "Millennium" before the predicted return of the Lord. He seems to utterly neglect the Scriptures which speak of the evil and continuing characteristics of this present age, he is wise in looking cheerfully on "the wheat," but fatuous in his forgetfulness of "the tares"; he has little place in his scheme for an "Apostasy," or for a "Man of Sin," or for the predictions of Jesus, and of Paul and of Peter, as to the character of the "last day"; he finds it difficult to preach a satisfactory sermon on the words of our Lord, "When the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?"

The false hope of an age of gold and of glory, evolving out of present conditions, and attainable by the powers of man, has led many teachers of this school into a false and foolish optimism, and into the endeavor to secure a Millennium by some form of social reconstruc-

tion, of universal democracy, of international compact.

To such empty dreams may be traced much of unpreparedness in time of war, much radical socialism in times of peace, and constant endeavors to "save society" aside from the transformation of individual souls.

Of course these weaknesses need not characterize Postmillennialists; only it is fair to say that they are as much in danger of dogmatism, and quite as often the victims of strange vagaries as are their brethren of the Premillennial school.

Those who deny that a Millennium is ever tc appear upon earth seem to attach too little weight to the stirring prophecies of the Old Testament which speak of the time when nations shall learn war no more, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, when there shall be one Lord, when the kingdom of God will be perfect and universal in all the world. They do not appear to consider all that Jesus has said of "the regeneration," or Peter of "the restitution of all things," or Paul of the

deliverance of "the whole creation" from its present bondage of corruption.

They are helpful, however, in reminding the Postmillennialists of the impossibility of finding in the Scriptures any prediction of a Millennium on earth during the present age and before the return of the Lord.

They wisely restrain the Premillennialists from introducing into the Millennial era features of blessing which belong to other ages. Possibly they are pointing all students of prophecy toward a meeting ground where they can unite in closer fellowship and can be stimulated by a more unified hope.

These teachers hold that the age of glory which lies beyond us is pictured by John as a "new heaven and a new earth." They term this "the eternal age," but their most distinguished writers affirm that this age is to have its earthly as well as its heavenly phase. That is, while not believing that a Millennium will appear on earth, they do affirm that there will be an age of glory upon earth.

Excepting in the use of terms, is not this a near approach to the position of the Premil-

lennialist? Is this essentially different from the view of the Postmillennialist, who likewise believes that this "eternal age" with its earthly phase will follow the return of Christ?

Shall this one prediction of the Millennium (Revelation 20) be allowed to seriously separate those who look for the return of Christ? Both the Premillennialist and the Postmillennialist admit that the Millennial age for which they are hoping is to be imperfect in nature, limited in time, and sure to end in the "last great failure of mankind"; both look for a future age of unbounded glory to follow the coming of Christ. Taking this passage at its face value, it does seem to predict, after the return of our Lord, a transitional age designated as "the thousand years"; but its content is so uncertain, and its description so brief and mysterious, that it need hardly be regarded as the supreme object upon the horizon of the future. Whatever their divergence of beliefs as to many matters of real significance, all schools of prophetic teaching are brought closer together as they unite in emphasizing the two great facts of inspired prediction, the

return of Christ, and the ultimate, universal, perfected kingdom of God upon earth.

> *"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun*
> *Does his successive journeys run,*
> *His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,*
> *Till moons shall wax and wane no more."*

Chapter VI: The Perfected Kingdom

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

"And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it." (*Rev.* 21:1-3, 24. R. V.)

"And he shewed me a river of water of life. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruits every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (*Rev.* 22:2. R. V.)

Chapter VI: The Perfected Kingdom

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth." With these words the Apostle John introduces the last and loveliest vision of his Apocalypse. The book has been filled with strange symbols and mysterious signs, but its constant message has been plain; it has been encouraging its readers with an assurance of the certain triumph of the cause of Christ. This last striking scene is likewise full of mystery, but its general meaning probably should be interpreted in accordance with the message of the book. It, too, may be a highly symbolic picture of the perfected kingdom of God upon earth.

There are, of course, other possible views. According to one, these closing chapters of the Revelation depict the present condition and privileges of the Christian Church during the existing age. According to a second view the scene reveals to us the future blessedness of the

saints, who have been transported to some distant sphere, and in resurrection bodies are dwelling amid heavenly glories.

No interpretation is free from difficulties. Is it not possible, however, that these chapters while containing much in support of these two views, rather fix our thought upon the peace and righteousness and joy which will some day flood with splendor this very earth on which we dwell?

It would be in accord with such a view to notice that there are two terms in the New Testament, each of which is translated by the word "new." One describes that which has recently come into being; the other characterizes that which has long existed, but which assumes a new aspect. It is the latter word which John uses when he introduces the picture of the "new heaven and the new earth." He is not necessarily describing a planet or heavenly sphere, called into existence to be the eternal home of the saints in light; but rather is picturing the moral and spiritual, possibly also the physical transformations which will characterize an age of glory upon earth. It is in agreement with this thought that he at once

declares, "and there was no more sea." Why make this statement in reference to a world which is literally new? If the "first heaven" and the "first earth" were actually destroyed, of course there would be no more sea, just as there would be no more land, no more mountains or cities; but it would appear that John is using the sea as a symbol of certain features of this present age which will be absent from the age to come.

He proceeds to describe the new Jerusalem, the Christian Church, not, however, as a newly created city, but rather as a future phase of "the Jerusalem which now is." (Galatians 4:25.)

Furthermore, John declares that "the nations shall walk amidst the light" of this city, "and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." (Rev. 21:24.) It is difficult to imagine that John is here referring to a new globe to which the nations of the earth have in some way been transferred.

Again, John describes "the tree of life," and declares that "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22:2.) From these and other features of this highly

symbolic scene it would appear that we have here a description of the condition which will exist on earth when the Church has fulfilled her great mission, when all the world rejoices in the truth which she embodies, when the kingdom of God is complete, when his dwelling place is among men.

Such a picture would form a fitting close to the entire Bible, for from first to last the drama of a Paradise Lost moves toward the climax of a Paradise Regained. Both Old Testament and New are replete with predictions of a perfected kingdom of God among men. This, in fact, might be stated as the very theme of the Bible. It is the story of redemption; more fully stated, its great subject is redemption through Jesus Christ with a view to the establishment upon earth of the perfected Kingdom of God.

The fulfilment of these predictions would seem to be too great and glorious to be crowded into the narrow and shadowy confines of a Millennium such as is described in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. That Millennium follows a scene of unparalleled carnage, and closes with a picture of universal war; but an

age is to come when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more." (Is. 2:4.) The Millennium of Revelation intimates a reign of Christ for "a thousand years," but the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah's reign declare that his rule is to be not only universal but unending; if not literally "eternal" upon the earth, at least not limited to a definite period of years: "They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. . . . In his day shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. . . . His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." (Psalms 72:5, 7, 17.) The initial fulfilment of all such Old Testament prophecies appears to be in the present age of Gospel influences, but the ultimate fulfilment seems to extend to a future unlimited era of blessedness upon earth.

It is difficult to determine just how far these predictions are to be interpreted as literal; but they seem to indicate such changes in man and in nature as will be permanent, and such as

would make impossible the tragedy in which the Millennium is pictured as ending; as, for instance, when Isaiah says: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together: and a little child shall lead them." (Is. 11:6.) These prophecies seem to point to the time of the "new earth," rather than to the limited and imperfect era of the "thousand years."

Those who feel convinced that the predicted reign of Christ upon earth is fulfilled in the Millennium are wont to lay great stress upon the message of the angel to Mary, the Mother of Jesus: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32.) It is insisted that this throne of David denotes an actual court in the city of Jerusalem where Christ will be enthroned as the literal King of the Jews, and there, in company with glorified saints, will reign for a thousand years; but if such a literal interpretation is demanded for the phrase "the throne of his father David,"

why shall there not be an equal insistence upon the term "forever," and upon the promise that "of his kingdom there shall be no end"? If it should be granted that the fulfilment of this prediction begins with a millennial reign, surely its completeness must include ages of infinitely longer duration. Both the Old Testament and the New apparently indicate that the prophets who spoke of the perfected kingdom of Christ agree with Daniel when he declared that this kingdom was to supersede permanently other kingdoms on earth. Such are his words, "and there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:14.)

In all these predictions, however, the perfected kingdom of Christ seems to be subsequent to his visible return in glory. Only then can the "new earth" appear. As Jesus declared, "the regeneration," the renewed heaven and earth, the age of glory and of gold, will come only when "the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory." (Matt. 19:28.)

Whatever of future blessedness for his followers may be symbolized in this prediction, it is evident that the reign he inaugurates and the blessedness they receive follow his future return.

In the second recorded sermon of Peter there is a surprising but plain prediction, when he urges his hearer to repent, "that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old." (Acts 3:19-21.) It is very evident then that only after the return of Christ can the earth rejoice in these "seasons of refreshing" and in "the restoration of all things."

That this ruined earth, in fact that the whole creation, is to receive such a renewal is even more fully declared in the profound and significant passage which Paul has penned in his Epistle to the Romans, where he declares that "the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God." (Rom.

8:19.) This "revealing of the sons of God" refers to their manifestation in glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, when, as Paul declares, "the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Paul further adds "for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also . . . waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (Rom. 8:21, 22, 23.) It is clear, therefore, that after the glorification of his followers, after the return of Christ, the whole creation will be glorified and renewed.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, likewise, seems to indicate that in such a "future inhabited earth," in such a "world to come," Christ is to attain his predicted, universal rule, as Son of God and Son of man. (Heb. 1:6, 13; 2:5-8.)

Perhaps the most difficult, but possibly the most definite passage, identifying the "new heaven and the new earth" with the future completed kingdom of God among men, is found in the closing chapter of Second Peter.

Here the Apostle, as he describes the return of Christ, does at first seem to indicate that at this time the present globe is to be destroyed before the appearance of "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." He declares "that the day of the Lord will come . . . and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up." It should be noted, however, that for the words "burned up," the most ancient manuscripts read "discovered" (R. V. margin). Nor does this necessarily mean the destruction of the earth, for Peter is comparing the changes which will introduce the "new earth" with those produced by the Deluge in which he also declares "the world that then was being overflowed with water perished." What he predicts is not an end of the globe but a moral transformation of the world.

It should be further noted that Peter is here employing figures of speech borrowed from the closing chapters of Isaiah. The prophet speaks of the "new heavens and new earth" and gives this figure of speech both to Peter and to John; but he uses it merely in relation to spiritual changes or political convulsions and never in-

tends to describe a destruction of the world.

It would seem that the coming of Christ will be attended by terrific convulsions, by social and cosmic disturbances, but that the issue will be a new and better age. The whole stress of his prediction seems to be laid by Peter upon the phrase which describes the "new earth" as being one "wherein dwelleth righteousness." Whatever transformation may await this world, whatever changes may come, it would seem that the perfected kingdom of God will be preceded by the personal and visible return of Christ. It may be unreasonable to expect that all men will agree upon the exact character of the predicted millennium whether they place this before or after the return of Christ; but a millennium is not the goal of prophecy; this goal is the perfected kingdom of God upon earth; and an increasing number of Christians are uniting in the belief that this unlimited and glorious kingdom of God is depicted by John under the figure of a "new heaven and a new earth"; and therefore, they earnestly pray—

"Come, and make all things new;
Build up this ruined earth;
Restore our faded Paradise,
Creation's second birth.

"Come, and begin thy reign
Of everlasting peace;
Come, take the kingdom to thyself,
Great King of Righteousness."

Chapter VII: The Present Duty

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (*Matt.* 28:19-20.)

"And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (*Rom.* 15: 13-14.)

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 *Thess.* 5:4-5.)

"Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh." (Matt. 24:42, R. V.)

Chapter VII: The Present Duty

In these familiar words our Lord Jesus Christ indicated what should be our attitude of mind toward the reality of his visible return; it should be that of continual watchfulness. One immediate result, probably the supreme consequence of such watchfulness, will be devotion to the service of the Master. However, to "watch" and to "work," while vitally related, are not the same. There may be idle watching, and there may be hopeless toil. Therefore, our Lord proceeded to explain at great length exactly what he regarded as the nature and the results of a true "watching" for his return.

He showed that the term must include a main element of real expectancy, yet he further indicated that this should be as far removed from feverish excitement as from careless disregard. During this present age Christians are not to consider the coming of Christ as imminent, until certain conditions are fulfilled. Nor yet

are they to relegate his return to a distant future, because all of these conditions may be fulfilled in any generation. It is as unwise to say that the Lord now may return "at any moment" as it is to insist that he cannot come until after a "thousand years," or, as some are intimating, until after the lapse of "a thousand millenniums."

The instructions of our Lord were very clear. In the prophetic discourse which reached its climax in the exhortation to "watch," he made it plain that his return would not be immediate; he declared that a long time would elapse between his ascension and his coming in glory. He described this present age which must intervene. He spoke of its "wars and rumors of wars" as characteristics of this era and not as signs of its end. He declares that the Gospel should first be preached "in all the world" and "unto all nations" before that end could come. He prophesied distinctly that, before his return, Jerusalem would be destroyed, an event which did not occur until more than thirty years after this discourse was delivered. He predicted that his followers would be found

among all nations and often be hated and persecuted, and that false prophets and false Christs would arise. He stated further that just before his return there would be a Great Tribulation, more terrible than the world had ever seen, and that "immediately after the tribulation" there would be startling and unmistakable signs in the heavens, and then "they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:29, 30.)

He further emphasised the long delay before his return for which his followers must be prepared by the parables with which he closed his discourse. He said that "the bridegroom tarried" until the midnight, until all who were expecting him slumbered and slept; he taught that he was like a man "travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods," and "after a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them." (Matt. 25:14, 19.)

In recording a similar parable, Luke states that the specific purpose of our Lord was to correct a false impression that he would return shortly: "Because," as Luke says, "they

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thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." (Luke 19:11.)

Quite plainly, therefore, Christ taught that before he should return, "having received his kingdom," considerable time must elapse and certain specified events must occur.

Yet while predicting this delay and describing these events, he at the same time insisted that his disciples should be watching for his return. Some modern students of prophecy experience a real difficulty in reconciling a state of watchfulness with the knowledge that definite things are predicted to occur before Christ appears. Yet was not this the exact situation of the early disciples? They were watching for their Lord to return, yet they knew that first a great crisis must arise in the political world, that armies must be gathered, and Jerusalem must be destroyed, and must "be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles" were fulfilled. (Luke 21:24.)

They knew that Peter must first grow to be an old man, and must suffer the death of a martyr, before his Lord would come. (John 21:18-22.) Yet day by day, and year after

year, while walking and working with Peter, his fellow disciples were watching for the coming of Christ.

These disciples knew that before their Lord returned the Gospel first must "be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14), and yet, though until after the stoning of Stephen no one had attempted to preach the Gospel outside the city of Jerusalem, nevertheless, meanwhile, these Christians were watching for the return of their Lord.

The explanation seems to be that all these predicted events might have occurred within the life-time of these apostles. The death of Peter was not very long delayed; within a generation Jerusalem was destroyed; and Paul declared, with pardonable hyperbole, that during his ministry the Gospel "was preached to every creature which is under heaven." (Col. 1:23.)

Exactly this attitude of mind should be ours. We may, we must be watchful, although we know of events which will occur before the Lord returns. The supreme precedent condition of his return is the evangelization of the world. Those who most eagerly look for the return of their Lord will be the most earnest in

pressing for the accomplishment of this task, believing that there is something more than youthful fancy in the familiar watch-word of a great missionary movement: "The evangelization of the world in this generation."

The example of Paul is quite as instructive as that of the early disciples. He never stated that he would live until the return of his Lord, but he frequently suggested that he might. When he uses the phrase "we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord," he simply identifies himself with Christians in general and proceeds to state what will be the experience of all believers who are living when the Lord returns. He does not mean to affirm that he will be of that number. If so, in other epistles, he would not have ranked himself among those who are to be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; Philip. 3:11); and again in other places stated that he was uncertain whether he would be living or not at the time when Christ should come. (2 Cor. 5:6-10; Philip. 1:21; 3:20, 21.) Only when, as an old man, in his final imprisonment at Rome, he was assured of his coming martyr-

dom did he give up the expectation that he might live until his Lord appeared. He then stated definitely that he was to die; but he intimated that Timothy, to whom he is writing, should preach the Gospel and should expect that in his life-time the Lord possibly might return. Paul did not expect, as he wrote from his dungeon, that the Lord might return at "any moment" and deliver him from death, but he did believe that the coming of Christ might take place in that very generation.

It is evident, therefore, that we cannot affirm that the coming of Christ is near, nor can we affirm that it is not. There seems to be no Scriptural warrant in the present day for the statement that "Christ will soon reappear." It is true that he may, but it is also true that his coming may be long delayed.

Those who are most insistent upon the imminence of this coming see signs of the Apostasy in the present state of the Church, and believe that present movements among the Jews indicate that the return of our Lord is near.

It is true that an apostasy is predicted as preceding this return, but surely there has been

greater spiritual declension in years that are past than exists in the present; for instance, in the tenth century, or in other dark ages of the Church and of the world.

Those who find in the condition of Israel a sign of the near approach of the advent, usually base their beliefs upon the parable of our Lord concerning "the fig tree." They argue that the fig tree (Matt. 24:32) is a type of Israel, and because our Lord affirmed that the budding of this tree is a sign of summer, therefore, any sign of new life among the Jewish people is an indication that the return of the Lord is near. It should be noted, however, that when Luke records the parable he says, "Behold the fig tree, *and all the trees,* when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." (Luke 21:29-31.) Both Matthew and Luke show plainly that these signs of the return of Christ are not the revival of Israel and of *all the nations,* but the darkening of the sun and the moon and the "distress of nations . . . when men's hearts are failing them for fear

and the powers of heaven are shaken . . . then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Luke 21:25-27.)

It is, therefore, unsafe to make predictions relative to the time of our Lord's return. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man." It is unfortunate that some persons in the present do not feel bound by this limitation of knowledge. They not only venture to say that the time is near, but they confidently state the year, if not the hour and the day, when Christ will come; while others, quite as confidently, affirm that the date is distantly remote. Either attitude of mind is contrary to the teaching of the Master.

It is interesting to note that, in his long discourse relative to watchfulness, Jesus first of all rebukes those who are like the servant who says "my lord delayeth his coming," and who shows himself indifferent to his lord's return and is unkindly disposed toward his fellow servants. This parable seems to have its first application to teachers and leaders in the modern Church, whose teaching and conduct imply

that the Lord cannot return until after the lapse of centuries.

The Master adds to this parable, however, others which still more practically describe the results of proper watchfulness. These are familiar parables; they concern our attitude toward his coming and were spoken in this immediate connection; they conclude his great prophetic discourse.

First of all is the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), which is intended to teach the spiritual preparation which will be manifested by those who are watching for the coming of Christ. Oil is the uniform symbol of the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, and that which distinguished the "wise virgins" from the "foolish" was the fact that the former "took oil in their vessels with their lamps" and when the bridegroom came their lamps were trimmed and burning. The Master intimates that all who truly are looking for his return will likewise be ready. Their lives will be like lights shining in a dark place; they will be prepared spiritually, and will enter into the joy of their Lord. "Watch, therefore," our Lord con-

cludes, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh."

The second parable is that of the servants to whom their Master entrusted certain talents expecting them to use these gifts for the advantage of their lord. Jesus thus taught the obvious lesson that in his absence each one of his followers must be faithful and diligent in the use of every opportunity, every gift, every "talent," to speed the Gospel and to advance his cause. Working and watching are not the same, but true watchfulness will always issue in wise and devoted Christian service.

Last of all the Master paints that august scene of judgment in which, under the figures of the "sheep" and the "goats," all nations are being divided. The ground of this judgment is the attitude which has been taken toward his own brethren. To those who had given food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, who had received strangers, who had clothed the naked, who had visited the sick and had relieved those in prison, he spoke those memorable words, "come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." There are many solemn truths

portrayed in this picture, but none is more obvious than this, namely, that those who truly are watching for the return of their Lord will be most unceasing in their work of loving sympathy and relief, finding in this sorrowing, suffering world continual opportunities for manifesting a spirit of true charity, and unconsciously ministering to their Lord in the persons of those who are most in need.

Those who are thus watching with hopeful expectation, with fervent spiritual life, with eager, faithful service, with tender self-forgetful sympathy, are able to pray most fervently and most sincerely, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

"Bring near Thy great salvation,
Thou Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of Thine elect,
Then take Thy power, and reign:
Appear, Desire of nations,
Thine exiles long for home;
Show in the heaven Thy promised sign;
Thou Prince and Saviour, come."

THE END

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